

Drop Zone

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Summary: Noble team is sent on a mission to repair a relay station in a forest. Nobles 1-5 are scared to death to set foot near that station, Noble Six soon learns why. Noble Team tries to keep it together, but when they land it becomes a battle for survival.

1. Chapter 1

Chapter 1: The Relay Station.

June 15, 2551, Noble HQ.

"Carter, Col. Holland is asking for you." Noble 2 said as she stepped away from a console.

"Thank you, Kat." Carter replied as he stepped in front of the console. "Carter here, go ahead, sir."

"Noble 1, exactly eighteen hours ago, a communications relay station 800 miles northeast of New Alexandria was taken offline. I need you and your team to get it back up and running." Col. Holland said over the comm. To that, everyone but Noble 6 looked at the comm. channel with a surprised expression.

"Who took the station out, Sir?" Carter asked.

"As far as command knows, no one has taken responsibility for the attack. But we have reason to believe it was rebel action." Col. Holland replied.

"Why would rebels want to take out a comm. Station?" Noble 5 asked walking up from behind Carter.

"An apt question Jorge, when you get there maybe you can ask them." Col. Holland replied.

"Noble Team will get the job done, Sir, Noble 1 out." Carter said as he cut the feed.

"Nobles, grab your weapons, put on your helmets, and get ready for a combat drop." Carter ordered to the rest of Noble Team as he put his helmet on.

_Yes Sir! _Was heard in unison throughout the small base as Noble Team did as instructed.

Outside the base where two UNSC Hornets, ready to take them to the drop zone. In under two minutes all of Noble Team: Carter, Noble 1. Catherine "Kat", Noble 2. Jun, Noble 3. Emile, Noble 4. Jorge, Noble 5. Jason, Noble 6.; were ready for the mission.

The ride to the relay station was a long and quiet one, the team exchanged glances every few minutes or so, but no general conversation.

Jason was the team's newest addition. Having only been on the team 2 months, he didn't really know much about the team's personal work ethics. That being said, Jason still knew the team was a little uneasy about the mission.

Feeling curious, he decided to break the long kept silence of the comms. "Why does everyone look so nervous?" He asked as laid back as he could to give the team the open air he felt they needed.

"It's nothing, Six; just, some bad memories there." Jorge replied, being the only one to do so.

"Why, what happened?" Jason probed as innocently as he could.

"It's personal, Six; best to leave it at that." Emile said.

"That may be team, but he's going to that station too. He may as well know why we may be a little on edge this mission." Carter said.

"He wasn't there, sir. He has no right to know." Jun protested with anger.

"He bears the name now; he has every right to know." Carter countered with the authority in his voice he tries to maintain.

The rest of the team doesn't argue, and Carter clears his throat before he begins his story.

"It was a year ago. On Reach. Our first Number Six, Tai, was with us on a mission to guard the relay station as maintenance teams worked to finish bringing the tower online with Kat's supervision. As Jorge, Emile, and myself were guarding the entrance from local insurrection, I had Jun and Tai stationed at the scaffold bars above us with sniper rifles. They were to alert us of any and all movement in the jungle around the station. As the night went on, as it's nearing night now, Tai saw a quick figure in the trees a hundred yards out. He thought it was just some of the local animals and left it be. Ten minutes later, he saw the same figure on the ground only thirty yards out, that's when he reported it to me. I too thought is just an animal and said to keep an eye on it. Five minutes later Tai saw the animal 15

yards out. I told him that if the animal was that suspicious to just go ahead and shoot it. He did, right in the head, and he told me that all the creature did, was stumble back and then took off running into the trees. In fifteen minutes, we heard Tai screaming through his comm. Jun tried to get to him in time. But all he found was Tai's helmet, his rifle, and his right hand still on the trigger, surrounded in a small pool of blood. I ordered Emile and Jun to meet up with me in the jungle as we searched for Tai and the creature. I had Jorge go inside and seal up the station and guard Kat and the workers until we came back. For an hour, we searched for Tai, as we were about to head back to the station and radio command, we heard a distant growl. We threw up our weapons, ready to shoot whatever came out of the dense brush of that damn forest with enough bullets to make it a walking chime. But what we saw was something that made us run.

"The creature walked into a patch of grass that the moon illuminated in a perfect pentagram. It was large, laced in a light black coat of ragged fur. Muscle laced under the skin. Two legs, two arms, each ending with four long, razor-sharp claws. It's head had fur going in straight spikes behind it. It's eyes were red, dark as blood, and appeared to be staring at your very soul.

"Inside its mouth, we saw it. We saw Tai, or what was still left of him. The top right-hand corner of his head was ripped off, with a steady stream of blood pouring from the exposed brain tissue. Both of his eyes were ripped out of their sockets, the cranial cords having been ripped during the action. His right hand wasn't the only limb missing, his entire right arm and his left leg were gone. His armor was scratched and severed in many places. The worst being his abdomen, which the creature's long fangs were deeply rooted into.

"After seeing the creature for ourselves, we ran. Like cowards we ran. Never turning back to that God-forsaken beast. As soon as we got back to the station Jorge opened the door and we poured in like scared children, because that was what we were right then, scared children. We screamed at Jorge to close the door before the creature would get in and to us what it did to Thai. After informing Kat and Jorge of what we saw, I ordered that everyone remain in the station until morning, when command was to have two a Pelican ready to pick us up and take us back to Noble HQ.

"When dawn came, I was the first to exit the station, armed and ready for the creature should it be waiting for us. I saw nothing and told everybody to exit the station and board the Pelican as quickly as possible before the creature could come out. But it never did. When we got back to HQ we informed command about the events the night before. Then we held a ceremony for Tai, using the helmet Jun kept as a gravestone to mark that he served as a Spartan, and died as a Spartan. Since then, Noble Team has never set foot on that station again. Until tonight."

When Carter finished his story, he rested his elbows on his knees and placed his mouth on his closed hands as he shut his eyes to collect himself. The rest of Noble Team aside from Jason also had to recompose themselves. Kat even had to turn her comm. off as they heard her starting to cry.

Jason took the rest of the flight to think about the wounds he may

have just opened, and the insensitivity he opened them with.

For the next twenty minutes, Noble sat in their seats until the pilots of the two hornets told them that they were landing and that they needed to get ready for the drop off.

2. Chapter 2

Chapter 2: Drop Off.

"Noble Team, we're at the drop site, beginning descent now." The pilot from the hornet carrying Carter, Jorge and Jason said over the comm.

"Alright, Emile, I want you with me inside the building with Kat while she works on the conduits. Jun, I want you on the roof of the station; keep an eye out for anything suspicious. Jorge and Jason, guard the perimeter." Carter ordered to the others.

Noble did as instructed and hopped off the hornets with their weapons in hand. Emile was armed with a shotgun; Carter carried an assault rifle and pistol as did Kat and Jason; Jun carried a sniper and a basic scope rifle; Jorge carried a mountable automatic machine gun.

When the team reached their respective posts, Jason may have been the only who wasn't a nervous wreck. Kat ran into the station with Carter and Emile coming up the rear at an equal pace; Jun climbed the ladder to the roof faster than he normally would; Jorge held a fierce grip on his weapon. If this was an ordinary mission, Jason would have told everyone to relax, but he knew better than to say much of anything right now.

When Jun reached the roof he immediately took a look through his scope and did a quick sweep of the perimeter.

"No hostiles in sight, Noble 1." Jun said into the comm.

"Alright, keep me posted if anything changes, Noble 3." Carter replied. "How bad is the station, Kat?"

"Worse than Col. Holland let on. There are signs of physical damage, but it doesn't appear any weaponry was used." Kat replied kneeling to examine a wall panel.

"How long will it take to get thâ€¦," Carter started.

"Sir, you may want to see this." Emile interrupted fifty feet away from Kat and Carter. They walked to Emile's position to see scratches along the walls. Each mark had five long, deep gashes into the walls' interior circuitry. On the back wall with a left turn that leads to the bowels of the station, there was a carving, one of a Spartan helmet.

"You don't think the creature's in the station do you?" Kat asked Carter.

"I don't know, but I think we need a link to command. They need to know the situation's escalated." Carter replied as he and the others

turned back towards the comm. terminal.

"I think I can re-route some external power to give you a temporary link to Col. Holland." Kat told Carter as she snipped and tied together different wires in the comm. terminal.

Back outside the station, Jorge and Jason were just watching the bushes and trees. For twenty minutes they did this, never speaking, rarely exchanging glances with each other.

Jason could feel a presence in the distance. He didn't know how else to describe it other than a pair of eyes watching his every move. The longer Jason held his post, the further the eyes' glance burned into his body.

When Jason heard a stick snap, he shot in that direction with his pistol. "Take it easy there, Jason. There's nothing there." Jorge said as Jason relaxed his posture and put the pistol back in his holster.

"Jorge, Jason, what's going on out there?" Carter asked over the comm. "Nothing, Sir. Jason's just getting restless." Jorge replied. "Jason, stay calm. We're trying to establish contact with command. If we get through, we're telling them that the station just needs a normal team of engineers to come fix it when we get back in the morning." Carter relayed the last of his words to Jun as well. "Thank God." Jun replied, still surveying the jungle through his scope.

In the station, Kat was still patching wires in the terminal to get Carter his link to Holland. While she worked, Carter and Emile talked about the claw marks and the carving on the wall.

"You know what made those marks Sir, we both do." Emile said, straining to hold what little respect he could keep in his voice at the moment. "We need to get the hell out of here before that beast kills us all."

"No," Carter began, protesting everything Emile said despite the urge to agree and just run for it. "If we don't kill this thing tonight, any and all people who come close to this forest will die. We can't let that happen. There's a colony with military guard twenty clicks out. When Kat has the link established, I'm going to tell Holland that we're going to the colony and starting fresh in the morning. This is a Noble mission; we have to kill the beast."

"Commander," Kat called, standing up from the terminal as it began to power up a weak, but working communication link. "You should be able to reach Col. Holland now." Kat finished stepping away from the terminal so Carter could work the controls. "Nice job." Carter said to Kat.

"Noble 1 to Col. Holland, do you read me?" Carter said trying to reach the Colonel. "Repeat Noble 1 to Col. Holland. Colonel, are you there?" Deciding that the link was useless, Carter made one last attempt. "Colonel, if you hearing this, know that Noble 2 has the station in a proper state for a regular repair crew. Noble Team will now make its way to Sacrilege Colony; I will attempt to contact you there in the morning." With that, Carter cut the feed and turned to face his Spartans.

"You heard me; we're heading to the colony and seeing if we can learn anything about this creature before we go sticking our necks out like dumb-asses." Carter said to Kat and Emile as he turned on his radio. "Noble one to Nobles 3, 5, and 6, mission accomplished. We are now heading for Sacrilege Colony. Jun, get down to the ground and get to Jorge and Jason, the three wait for us, I want to check out one more thing before we start moving." Carter ordered to the others as he walked past Kat and Emile and towards the wall with the markings.

"If this thing was in here the whole time we were, why didn't it attack?" Kat asked walking up behind Carter with Emile close behind her.

"I don't know, but let's be grateful it didn't." Carter replied as he turned to walk out of the station.

Near the outside doors of the station stood Jun, Jorge, and Jason, weapons at their sides. When the doors to the station opened, Carter, Kat, and Emile walked out with their weapons at the same position.

"Let's move." Carter ordered to everyone as he began walking into the woods.

While Noble Team hiked through the dense forest, they held their guns at the ready should anyone, or any_thing_ jump out at them. The hike was long and slow. The sweat in everyone's brows was easy to tell through their helmets. The longer they walked, the longer the forest seemed to be. Carter wasn't entirely sure of their direction, but used the stars to discern certain locations, until he got to one point, where the stars and the moon made a perfect pentagram over a large cavern. This was when Carter stopped walking and lowered his gun. He looked the place over with his mind, and couldn't figure out just what it was supposed to be. He walked closer to it, and Jason asked, "Sir, what're you doing?"

"I think we should check out this cavern. Don't ask why, it's just, I have a feeling something's not natural about it." Carter replied putting his gun back up and proceeding towards the entrance to the cave.

"This cannot end well." Emile replied as he and the others followed Carter inside.

3. Chapter 3

Chapter 3: Cave of Secrets

Noble Team is now walking through the deep, mysterious cavern of the cave Carter saw on the way to the colony. The cavern was a maze of darkness, each step the team took, the less they could see. Night Vision let them see each other, but anything else other than the ground beneath their feet, were few and far in-between.

"How long do you think this cave is, Commander?" Jorge asked.

"I don't know, but I guess we'll find out soon enough. Stay close, keep your eyes up front, and shoot anything that isn't human." Carter

replied.

For thirty minutes, Noble Team has wandered endlessly through the cavern, whose only equal, could be an abyss, an abyss of darkness. Keeping their guns heinously pointed at the darkness that was in front of them, ready to shoot when or if something should pop out of the dark. A time or two, Emile tried a snide comment to ease some of the tension, but his efforts were only rewarded with a joint, "Shut the hell up!" from Jorge and Jason.

Jun, not being used to tight spaces, was a little more on edge than the rest. He tried his best to keep himself composed. The only short-ranged weapon Jun had on him was a pistol, feeling his sniper would be less than useless in the cave; he kept his pistol aimed at the darkness.

Now 300 feet into the cave, Carter took a step forward, and plummeted into a recess farther down the cavern. A light scream escaped his usually calm body as he landed on the cold, damp, dark cave floor. The rest of the team looked down the hole, not being able to see Carter through the wall of darkness that laced the very air of the cavern.

"Carter, you alright?" Jorge asked.

"Fine, come down, I think you guys will want to see this." Carter replied.

As Carter stared into the blank abyss of the cave, he saw a small, white, bright light in the distance that led into another labyrinth of the cave. It beckoned his curiosity and Carter began the slow, steady movement towards the light.

_Usually they tell you don't walk towards the light, but it's better than standing around here. _Carter thought to himself as he walked ever closer to the small glow.

The rest of the team was steadily making their way down, aside from Jorge who just jumped and took his chances. When everyone was down the crevasse, they too noticed the light, and saw Carter walking slowly towards it. Everybody joined him and when they got to the lightâ€¦it vanished.

"What the hell?" Jason said quietly under his breath. The rest of Noble Team was thoroughly distraught by this, and they walked farther into the cave hoping to get to the end of it.

Boy were they wrong.

As they walked along the cavern, they saw a multitude of openings, almost like doorways, sinking into the walls of the cave. Once again, they saw a small light. The same light they saw retreat deeper into the darkness.

"You don't think somebody's in here with us?" Jun asked as they walked towards the light yet again, finally lowering their arms. The light was yet again retreating into the darkness.

Noble Team walked with the light, letting it be their guide in this labyrinth of darkness that surrounded them. Through twists and turns

in a never ending swirl of dark walls, Noble Team finally came upon a large wall with the light that guided them there emanating from it.

"Think there's a way inside?" Jason asked as he came up on Carter's side.

"Has to be, somebody had to turn that light on. Noble, find a switch, or a lever, orâ€¦ something, just get this damned door open." Carter ordered.

Kat searched through the rocks on the ground while Jun looked through his sniper's scope to see the rocks above. Jorge, Carter, Emile, and Jason felt along the walls trying to find something. As Emile was feeling around a section of the wall ten feet to the upper-left, a stone he touched fell into the wall. There was low rumble from the section of the wall with the light as it began to slowly split apart.

The wall's hole continued to grow larger as it slid apart further. When the wall finally reached its climax, and left a vertical rectangle ten feet high in the middle.

"Be careful, anything moves, shoot it." Carter ordered as he slowly stepped inside the cavern.

The hole led to what could only be called a lab. Tall tubes slinked across the walls with long wired tubes draped across them and had small crackles of electricity spill out of a few of them. Tables with many surgical instruments were laid across the ruined, scratched, metal floor. Many vials and beakers had various chemicals in them. At the far end of the room were two tubes that were in-tact, but the one that was in the middle was broken.

"Commander, you may want to see this." Kat said being the first to notice the tubes.

"What is it, Kat?" Carter asked walking over to her, his eyes scanning the lab through his visor.

"It's some kind of stasis pod, but something smashed through the glass." Jun said walking up behind them. Jun looked through his sniper scope and saw some kind of chemical residue spread across the broken glass.

"5 and 6, recon the north of the lab, 4 and 2 take the South, 3, you're with me on this end. Move out." Carter ordered.

Noble Team moved to their respected positions and began looking around the lab for any sign of recent usage. Jorge saw a scalpel with dried blood on it. Kat saw several specimens in jars along the counters. Jun saw more chemical residue along the rest of the pods. Carter saw something on the ground and knelt down to pick it up.

"I've got a talon over here, doesn't look like it's been here long. Stay alert." Carter said over the comm.

Jason walked along the lab, using the wall as a guide to a turn. A moment later he found his turn, a long corridor with ruined wall

panels. The panels that weren't ripped out of the wall were slashed through in four, long, deep rows.

This must've been where that creature resided all this time, Jason thought as he placed his hand against one of the panels.

"Status report." Carter ordered. A group of nothing came from 2, 4, and 5. Jason didn't respond; he kept walking through the hall, with a firm grip on his gun.

"Noble 6, report. Jason come in." Carter hailed again.

"Uh, this is 6; I found a corridor along the North-West end of the lab. I haven't found anything yet. Permission to recon this sector alone." Jason replied finally.

"Negative 6, we'll converge on your location, sit tight." Carter ordered.

"Affirmative." Jason said as he examined the panel again.

Finding it peculiar to see this type of cutting through steel was alarming to Jason. In all of the reports from science teams, none of them have ever reported seeing an indigenous creature that could do this type of damage. Was it indigenous, or did somebody make this thing? This question burned through Jason's mind again and again; all the while he silently waited for his team's arrival.

A few moments later, Carter and the others met up with Jason.

"What's that on the wall?" Jun asked Jason while walking towards one of the panels.

"Claw marks. My guess is that whatever creature you guys ran into that night, probably lived here." Jason replied.

"Or born here." Kat added. The rest of the team looked at her with a surprised expression under their helmets. Kat walked down the corridor to a long, slender door. She pushed it slightly and it slowly opened with an eerie creaking sound. The noise made everyone's military cut hair stand on edge. Kat was the first to enter the room, her pistol aimed straight ahead and her finger itchy on the trigger. The rest of the team entered soon after.

The room was a maze of wires and terminals, each one coalescing with the other. Thirty feet from the door was a balcony, overlooking two long rows of pods, but unlike the ones Noble Team already saw, these were intact.

"What the hell is in those things?" Emile asked bewildered at what he saw.

"Let's go find out." Jorge replied as he started walking towards the stairs precariously perched at the left corner of the balcony.

"Now hold on one minute, Jorge." Carter halted him. "Kat try to get through to command, ask them if they know anything about this place." Carter ordered turning to face her.

Kat started checking through a handheld comm. terminal she had and looked for a channel to command. For a few moments she didn't speak, still scanning through the signals.

"I can't get a connection, Commander." She finally said.

"Damn it. Okay, we'll investigate the pods, but don't touch anything, understood?" Carter said firmly.

"Understood." The team replied in unison.

Noble Team headed down the staircase to the pods one after the other. The pods were foggy, covered in mold and cobwebs from possibly months of inactivity. The control panel for each pod was still online oddly enough; each had a small glow of hibernation to it. At the end of the rows of pods, was a central console. Larger than the others, this one didn't look dormant; the dust layer was fairly fresh compared to the rest.

"Somebody's been here; maybe one of the colonists?" Carter theorized.

"We should get out of here before they come back." Jorge suggested.

"Agreed; move out, find an exit." Carter replied.

Noble Team walked around the lab endlessly, no exit in sight. Emile felt around the walls, hoping for another secret door. His efforts were fruitless; not a door to be found. Jun looked around the top with his scope, hoping to see something that everybody would miss. This too, was a futile effort. Was there a door out? Kat was walking behind the large terminal when she placed her hand on the wall to her left. To her, and everybody else's surprise, a door opened along the paneling; a door with a long staircase going upwards.

"Commander, I found an exit." Kat called out.

"Good work; you heard her men, let's get the hell out of here." Carter ordered.

"With pleasure, Sir." Jorge replied.

Noble Team then ascended up the staircase, anxious to escape the labyrinth of the lab that left them with many questioned they hoped command could answer. Kat was the first to exit, having to kick a fairly door sized boulder out of the way.

It was dawn; the first glimpses of sunlight were bearing down on the land before them. Noble's eyes burned under their helmets from the brightness they haven't seen in hours. They scan around the unfamiliar landscape, simple houses and one fairly well designed guard post.

They've made it to the colony.

"Whoever made that lab, best guess, they live here." Jason said.

"Right, think we should pay them a visit?" Emile suggested.

"No, we need to talk to command about this. Kat, Jorge, go to the guard post and see if you can get a hold of Col. Holland. The rest of you, you're with me. We're questioning the whole colony." Carter ordered.

_Something's not right here. _Jason silently thought to himself.

4. Chapter 4

Chapter 4: The Colony of the Fauschers.

Noble Team walked went on their respective assignments. Kat and Emile were walking to the guard post at the south end of the colony, while Carter and the others were going to find the head of the colony. The morning sun usually meant the start of the colonists' day, but now it seemed like it wasn't even there. The doors to the huts were closed tightly, like prison cells. Not even the fauna of the area was around here, only silence.

"Sir, where is everybody?" Jason asked impatiently.

"They should be around here somewhere..." Carter trailed off.

Somebody had to be in the colony, Carter thought as he approached one of the huts. Touching the control pad, the door to the hut slid open. Carter was the first to enter, signaling the others to stay back. Inside, he saw the simple accommodations of the colonist huts he so rarely entered. A couch, a table, kitchen, bedroom, comm. Terminal. In the kitchen Carter saw some broken glass along the floor. He walked towards it, hoping to find someone cleaning a cut or something. Instead, he saw a mutilated body. Blood was spilled all along the kitchen tile and refrigerator. The person's chest cavity ripped in half with brute force, its organs open to the air. Its eyes were wide, probably filled with terror before life left them. Its right was gone, a large pool of blood dried where the arm used to rest.

"I've got a body in here!" Carter called as he put his gun away and examined the body. As he gently brushed the left shoulder, something fell out of its shirt pocket. Carter picked it up and examined it, a data storage device. The others walked into the room, the stench piercing their nostrils, burning them with the smell of death.

"Kat should take a look at this; she may be able to pull something off of it." Carter said handing the device to Jun. "Get that to her, fast." Carter ordered. Jun nodded and left with a quickening pace.

"Who did this, Sir?" Jorge asked.

"If I had to guess, I'd say it's whatever we saw that night. Meaning that thing's still alive and kicking." Carter replied as he stood up. "Move out, search the huts, radio if you see anything. Find a living colonist, hold them. We'll ask questions later."

Jason and Jorge split up along the huts through the area, 23 in all.

Carter took his own section behind the hut they were just in. In each hut, the same thing was found, nothing. No bodies, no people, just empty huts.

At the guard station...

Kat and Emile walked around the whole station, not one guard to be found. The station had a comm. Terminal, but there was no power to operate it. Kat sent Emile to find a generator.

Emile walked down the stair case to the basement. Smelling something foul in the air, he walked to the generator. What he saw, was something he hoped to not see.

Another corpse, in worse shape than the last and fresher too. Like the body Carter saw, this one was mutilated to every point on its body. But a difference was that it wasn't missing any limbs.

"Commander, this is Emile, respond." Emile said into the comm.

"Affirmative, go ahead." Carter said as he walked around the empty huts.

"Sir, we've got a body. Have you seen anything on your end?" Emile replied, carefully picking through the body's coat pocket for any form of I.D.

"We've got a body as well. We are currently looking for more but have not found anything, copy?" Carter replied.

"Yes, Sir. What do you want done with the body?" Emile asked removing a data drive from the corpse's coat.

"Leave it. If you've found anything on it, take it to Kat. We'll rendezvous with you later at the station, Noble 1 out." Carter replied before shutting off his channel.

_What is this thing? _Emile thought as he scanned over the drive in his hands. He walked away from the corpse and began going back to Kat.

"Jorge, Jason, did you guys find anything?" Carter asked on his comm.

"No, Sir." Jason replied "Negative." Jorge replied.

"I've got a live one here, Sir!" Jun called.

"Okay, hold him. Bring him to the guard station. 5 and 6 converge on my position." Carter ordered as he began jogging to the station.

Jun held the colonist's arm firmly, trying not to let him run. Something had the farmer spooked but Jun couldn't tell what it was. The farmer spoke in a language Jun didn't understand, making communication difficult at best. The walk to the guard station took longer than expected. Jun had to stop several times just to keep hold on the farmer. It took Jun an hour just to get to the station's gate. Carter, Jason, and Jorge were standing outside waiting for

him.

"What took you so long?" Jorge asked comically.

"Traffic was murder; this guy had to stop every five minutes." Jun played.

"Who are you, Sir?" Carter asked the farmer.

The farmer yelled in a language that nobody understood.

"Wir müssen uns verlassen, bevor das Monster tötet uns wie alle anderen auch!" The farmer was hysterical with fear, shaking and flailing his limbs like a carp on the side of the river.

"Jorge, do you know what he's saying?" Carter asked.

"Not really, Sir," Jorge replied.

"What do you mean?"

"It sounds German, but I never really understood the language much. I can make out a few of the words, but the rest will take some time."

As Jorge and Carter conversed about the language barrier between them and the colonist, the farmer found the opportunity to back out of the station. Once out, he ran like child fleeing from a bath. Into the forest he ran, unaware of anything that might happen, only wanting out of the colony.

In the wild mass of the jungle beyond the small amount of colony huts a figure moved swiftly over the branches. The farmer was oblivious to the figure standing above him. The figure twitched with animalistic fury, craving the blood of a kill. The farmer heard a rustle above him; the figure was acting recklessly for one trying to act silently. As soon as the farmer looked above him, the creature pounced with a roar.

Noble Team heard the screams of the farmer at the guard station, until they went silent.

"We've got to find that farmer." Jorge said as he was about to leave the station.

"No; something's not right here." Carter said, trying to think past his worry about the farmer. The tactical thinking he must do is clouded with thoughts of what happened to the farmer.

"The thing that killed the colonists is toying with us. If we try to leave, we're as good as dead. The farmer ran like a dumb-ass and got himself killed. We need to be calm, and learn how to take that creature down." Carter told everyone, his blood boiling at his own words.

"Sir, there isn't any data on this creature; nobody knows anything about it much less how to kill it." Kat replied, the fear in her voice clearly present.

"The lab in the cave has to have something to do with that creature.

We can go back and try to figure out who made it. It's clear whoever did lives around here." Emile spoke up.

"It's as good a place as any to try. Move out Noble!" Carter ordered.

As Noble Team left the guard station, they were greeted with the gruesome remains of the farmer whose screams they heard in the forest. His arms stripped down to the bone, blood slowly secreting from whatever muscle tissue remained. His legs were broken and twisted in ways they would normally wouldn't. His face is mangled, skin pieces few and far between. The top of his head ripped down the middle, small amounts of brain tissue where visible to Noble. Where they expected to find the lifeless eyes, he found two carved out crevasses with a small pool of blood in each. Blood slowly drained out of his mouth. His torso must have taken the worst of the beating. His ribs broken with a two peeking out of his abdomen. Blood was completely covering his body.

The smell of the putrid blood in the hot day sun made all of Noble gag a little bit.

As Noble Team was about to walk toward the cave, the corpse twitched violently.

"What the hell," Carter said.

The corpse was changing. His broken arms were growing back the muscle they've lost, but no skin covered them. The legs lengthened and now bent the way a bird's would, talons were also growing out of them. Noble Team was startled by this event and began backing away from the mutating corpse.

The corpse's head melted off the skin and meat surrounding it, leaving nothing but a skull. It's jaw grew two long, horrific fangs that protruded from the top of it's maw. The arms reached out, growing in length; skin began to grow from the bone itself; the skin continued to grow outwards, surpassing even the phalanges of the hand, the final product of the skin being two long, greyish wings. The fingers on its hands seemed to meld together, except for the index finger and thumb, which grew along with the other fingers to become five inch long talons. The abdomen of this thing grew and narrowed along the spinal cord while the top three ribs grew outward. The legs grew fifteen inches longer, the feet growing an extra five; the phalanges melding into two, long, grotesque talons. The skull grew in proportion to the rest of the body; the eyes hollow, staring into them was like looking into an empty void.

The creature swooped it's powerful wings to shield itself from the hot midday sun. Carter took a step towards it, his finger tense and twitching on the trigger of his assault rifle. The creature opened its wings to let out a deafening screech that made all of Noble Team take a step back. It then leapt into the air, flapping its wings violently. It flew through the air to the top of the guard station. It perched itself precariously on the ledge, overseeing Noble Team like they were corpses for a vulture.

A green fluid of some sort dripped out of the creature's mouth like saliva, melting the ground around Noble Team's feet.

"No sudden moves," Carter ordered to everyone as he aimed his rifle at the beast, awaiting the chance to shoot.

Everyone was paralyzed with both fear and confusion from the situation. Above them was a creature that used to be man's corpse eying them with its soulless eyes.

What was next?

5. Chapter 5

Chapter 5: Lockdown

The winged creature still watched Noble Team like a cat would with a mouse. Its acidic saliva continued to drip from its mouth. It didn't cause any damage to the bones it slid on, but it melted the grass and dirt it fell upon at the bottom of the guard station.

Whatever happened to make the farmer mutate into such a monstrosity must be connected to that laboratory, Carter thought.

Carter needed to act. There was no doubt in his mind that this creature would make a move sooner or later, but he had hoped it would wait until it was provoked.

The creatures hollowed eyes stared at all of them, eyes weren't needed to show the hunger the creature was afflicted with.

Jun took his sniper and aimed at the creature's exposed skull. Without hesitation, he shot it right in-between the eyes. The creature stumbled back, but did not fall off the guard rail. The bullet was visible as it protruded out of the skull and fell to the ground. Jason looked at the creature's wound. It was healing. No blood came out, but the bone repaired itself and within seconds it appeared as though there was no entry wound at all.

"What the hell," Jun said.

"Scatter!" Emile yelled and everyone ran in opposite directions.

This spurred the creature into action as it descended at a lightning pace towards the nearest Spartan. Jorge was barely able to get his large frame out of the way before the creature could stab him with its sharp fangs. Though he did not move fast enough, the creature was still able to get a bite out of Jorge's left calf.

Jorge let out a small scream due to the pain emanating from the now partially gone calf. Jason ran over as fast as he could to help Jorge move toward the guard station. Everyone else made similar moves hoping to stay out of the way of the creature's fangs.

Once inside the guard station, Kat inputted some commands to the station's consoles. The doors shut and sounded as if they were bolting themselves together.

"I initiated lockdown procedures for the entire station; we should be safe." Kat said moving to check on Jorge's leg.

"We're trapped, not safe." Jason retorted angrily kneeling next to Kat as she removed the armor around Jorge's leg.

"It's good enough for now." Carter interjected. "Kat how's his leg?"

"Best I can say, the creature didn't take much out of him, but he'll need a doctor when we get out of here; if we get out of here." Kat replied, still examining the open wound Jorge would sport for a while.

Jorge's calf was missing half of its original mass, and what was there was bleeding terribly. Kat walked around the station looking for something to help stop the bleeding. Coming across a restroom, she grabbed a towel and hurried back to Jorge. She wrapped the towel as tight as she could around his wound, hoping it would be enough until they could get him to the infirmary. What concerned her at the moment wasn't the bleeding, but the wound itself. The creature bit through his armor and yanked a piece of his calf muscle in one fell swoop!

Carter wasn't as concerned with the wound as he felt he should be. Instead, he was worried that whatever made the farmer's body turn into that thing could happen to Jorge right now.

The farmer was German, Carter thought. Germany hadn't gotten written permission to start a colony on Reach. To Carter's knowledge, most Germans stayed on Earth and tended to the countries that had fewer caretakers than others. Did a German stowaway on a cruiser scheduled to make a pioneer drop a few months ago? If so, who were the other farmers that were killed, and why didn't they change like the recently slaughtered farmer?

Carter didn't have much time to contemplate his theories when he heard a faint rustling coming from a staircase a few feet away. A part of him hoped it was just Jason or Emile pacing around, but everybody was right in front of him.

"Emile," Carter called.

"Sir," Emile replied.

"Didn't you say you discovered a body in the basement?" Carter asked, still hoping he was wrong.

"I did but, oh shit." Emile said when the thought reached him too.

Everybody else followed suit with different expressions hidden by their helmets.

"Jason, you're with me. The rest of you, guard Jorge." Carter ordered as he cocked his pistol.

Carter and Jason walked down the staircase slowly, hoping that if something was down there they wouldn't tip it off that they were there as well. The place was dark; any lighting available had long since been cut off.

Carter motioned for Jason to turn on his flashlight, though now he

wished he hadn't. The place was abysmal with blood stains. In the back Jason could see shelf like cabinets that hadn't been used in years by the UNSC. Boxes of files sat in rows along the shelves covered in a thick layer of dust and blood.

On the other side of the towers, Jason could have sworn he saw eyes staring back at him and Carter. _God how he wished it was just a feeling._

Something started walking along the sides of the towers like a tiger would as he eyed his prey. Jason raised his assault rifle ready to shoot at the first thing that crawled out of the darkness. His thoughts were soon realized when a beast lunged itself, knocking over several of the towers in doing so, at the two Spartans.

The creature was midsized, bi-pedal, and covered in a type of fungi that bled terribly along its arms and legs. Carter noticed that under the creature's fungi covered midriff was what appeared to be part of a UNSC patrol guard uniform.

"How exactly do we kill a corpse, Commander?" Jason asked aiming at the monstrosity that circled them.

"Best guess; shoot it 'til it falls." Carter replied as he fired his pistol at the beast.

The bullet entered the monster's abdomen, but unlike when Jun shot the creature outside in the head, the bullet didn't fall out of the body. The creature howled in pain, something that caught both Jason and Carter by surprise. The abdomen of the beast was covered in the same fungi that covered its arms and legs, and was bleeding excessively. The blood that was coming out didn't look like normal blood though; it was almost as if there were bones coming out as well.

As more and more blood and bone came out of the monster, the more its body seemed to droop to the floor. Once what appeared like the last bone in its body fell out, the creature laid on the ground still.

"What the hell was that?" Carter asked as he and Jason took cautionary steps towards the creature.

The body was limp and appeared to just be skin and fungi. The blood and bones of the thing were in one large pool around the _shell._

"We should tell the others about this." Jason said.

Carter nodded in agreement and began walking towards the staircase.

Emile was visibly worried about Carter and Jason as he paced nervously around the room, holding a fierce grip on the trigger of his shotgun. Jun and Kat both tried to calm him down but their efforts were fruitless. They felt Emile won't calm down until they're on the first hornet out of this hellhole.

Jorge's wound had stopped bleeding a few minutes ago, but the pain was still present on his face. Kat had searched the entire floor for

a first aid kit but hadn't found one. Jun looked through a small window above the staircase and couldn't see the creature, but he did see that the sun was setting. The last thing any of them wanted was to move through those woods at night.

When Carter and Jason were back in the room, Jorge barely turned his head to see them.

"Commander, what happened? We heard a shot." Jun inquired.

"The corpse Emile found under the basement turned like the farmer. But he was different, he didn't mutate into a freaking pterodactyl. If anything, he turned into a giant mushroom with a drive to eat us." Carter explained.

"How'd you manage to kill it?" Emile asked bewildered at the possibility of these things having a weakness.

"Carter shot it in the abdomen. After that, it was if the entire thing just fell apart from the inside out." Jason replied.

"More likely there's a middle bone that connects everything. It must be very fragile and one shot shattered the bone. I don't know if it'll work on old ugly out there, but if it comes down to it, we'll find out." Carter said.

While the others conversed, Jorge sat in his corner. They were completely oblivious to him. Thus, they didn't see what was happening to him. His wound was healed, but no skin covered the new calf muscle. His teeth were feeling jagged, almost sharper.

"Guys," Jorge called through his pain. His arms were twitching as his bones moved under his skin. His right fingers appeared to be growing into each other and their nails were growing into one long blade. His left arm seemed to be shrinking. His hair was falling out of his head. His tongue grew longer and thinner, the tip splitting into two, resembling that of a snake's. His armor was being broken by the changes his body was experiencing. The sounds of the metal breaking were what alerted the others to what was happening to their friend. His right arm's new scythe-like blade continued to become sharper and larger. His body thinned out as his spine lengthened. His skin fitted to the bones as his vertebrae began to grow their own individual spikes that protruded out of the skin on his back by at least five inches.

"My God," Jun said watching this happen to Jorge but helpless to do anything about it.

Jorge's Legs broke out of his armor as they lengthened; his toes growing into three eight inch long claws. His skin took on a pale greenish color. The top of his head grew at least five times larger than its normal size but his jaw remained the same size as his new profound fangs began to form their way out of his mouth. His lips were ripped by his teeth tearing through them, the blood trickling down his mouth.

When his transformation finished, the former Jorge stood twelve feet tall. His right arm was now a scythe with flesh growing along the back edge of the blade made of pure bone. His left arm was now comparable to Kat's in size, but hung at his left shoulder

nonetheless. His eyes were hollow; they stared at his friends with no life whatsoever. His torso now is thin with his ribcage visible through the thin layer of skin covering him. His back now revealed a series of long spikes following the line of his vertebrae.

Carter looked at his friend. Three minutes ago it was Jorge, a well-disciplined, strong as an ox Spartan. But now, it was another beast created by means no one knew how to interpret.

Jorge looked at his friends the way a football player would a buffet. He let out a lifeless roar to inform everyone that Jorge was dead, but the nightmare continues.

6. Chapter 6

Chapter 6: Trust No One.

The beast that used to be Jorge lunged at Emile swinging its scythe-arm rapidly. Carter shot him multiple times with his assault rifle. While the bullets still entered Jorge's body, he felt no pain. The bullets left his body and struck the floor on the opposite side; they entered with a bang.

The beast swung his massive scythe at Jason. Jason shot the blade with his pistol, sending a vibrational feedback through the beast's arm and upper body. The pain was severe, causing the beast to stumble back toward the wall.

"It's the scythe! The vibrations hurt it!" Jason yelled as he shot at the scythe again, sending another wave of vibrations through the beast's body. The pain from the bullets ricocheting off the beast's scythe radiated throughout its entire body like a tuning fork.

Emile took his shotgun and fired one precision shot at the beast's tailbone, which protruded slightly out of the beast's rear. The high-power surge of the shrapnel striking against the tailbone sent the beast into an uproar.

"Its like the bastard's bones are hollow. Jun, strike the vertebrae!" Emile said as he took another shot at the beast's protruding tailbone.

Kat was firing several rounds from her assault rifle at the scythe, all but a few bullets struck on target. Jun took careful aim with his pistol at one of the veritable spikes sticking out of the creature's spine. He shot two rounds at the top spike and the bottom spike, sending a horrific flurry of vibrations through the creature's spinal cord.

The pain from the onslaught of bullets and vibrations rattled the beast's insides, almost to the point of having the organs in a blender set on high. Noble Team continued to fire bullet after bullet on the beast, hurting the creature to the point of stumbling back and falling through the wall adjacent to the door of the guard station.

Everyone stopped firing long enough to see the creature on its back, and the hole they just made in the wall. The fear that the beast that chased Noble Team into the station in the first place could just walk

in and slaughter everyone where they stand gripped them.

The beast made no immediate movement. Carter was the first to walk around to the front of the creature's massive body, closely followed by Jason and Emile. Blood was flowing profoundly through the holes layered around the creatures back from the spikes sticking out of the spine. Carter knelt down beside the creature's head and stared at the empty holes that were its eyes.

"We need to get out of here and get in contact with Holland. Any suggestions on how we do that?" Carter said as he stood back up.

"We could make for the farmland. Try to get as far away from the mountain as possible." Emile replied pointing out west to the long-dead crops sticking out of the soil.

"Are you crazy? We'll be sitting ducks out there!" Jun retorted.

"Well I don't see you coming up with any bright ideas." Emile said disdainfully as he stepped closer to Jun with his finger inching away at the trigger of his shotgun.

"Break it down, both of you." Carter ordered sternly. "I don't know what's out there, but I do know we won't last much longer if we don't get out of here. Now both of you can quit arguing and come up with something, or we can leave your asses behind for that bird thing out there."

"Commander, I think I might have something." Kat called with her head out the hole and her cybernetic arm on her pistol.

"What is it, Kat?" Carter asked as he stepped towards the hole.

"Over there," Kat said pointing at a tall tree "Jun give him your rifle."

Carter looked through the sniper scope and saw the tree a quarter mile away from the station. It was tall, sixty feet; the leaves have long since been dead from the harsh weather. On one of the long, dead branches, was the monster that took a bite out of Jorge's leg.

The beast was sitting there, his eyes staring at the station with an empty hunger. The beast's ears twitched slightly as a cool breeze brushed past the thin, tender skin covering the flesh beneath it.

Carter handed the sniper rifle back to Jun. Jun looked through the scope himself to verify what Carter had seen.

"How do we kill something that can heal itself?" Emile asked.

"We don't. We avoid it as long as we can while making our way out of the village." Jason said peeking through the hole in the wall.

"That's a nice idea, Six. But I'm not sure how we can avoid that thing without a distraction." Kat replied.

"Emile, do you still have those incineration charges?" Jun asked kneeling down near Jorge's mutated corpse.

"Yeah, why?" Emile replied plucking a charge from his left hip.

"I think I've found a distraction." Jun said with a smirk hidden by his helmet.

End
file.